ZXF 05

Spectrum computing today

ZXIF
ZXCF
SZX
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plus...
REALX exclusive

exp

> PICK UP THE PEN

With the launch of ZXIF, a look at some of the issues relevant to writing Spectrum Interactive Fiction in the 21st Century.

One of the pieces of feedback I received from one of my **Blink** playtesters was, "think it's a good idea not to include graphics as people expect too much these days, so with just text, it's left to your imagination." Computer games, of course, have evolved a great deal since the Spectrum's heyday; the same is true of the adventure game, but where arcade games have added in just about every bell and whistle known to humankind over the last 20 or so years, the text adventure has evolved into a much simpler, purer artform. **Interactive Fiction** is the new title for this genre, in fact, and an appropriate one it is too, when you think about it. On download or purchase of an IF game it is a *piece of writing* that you have your hands on, after all, and thus it is the quality of the writing that counts. It's not that I'm against graphics in adventure games - I'm not; well chosen images can do a lot to enhance atmosphere - but when we're talking 48K Spectrum, the amount of memory you have availible is already a limitation on the amount you can write - and if this is to be the main criteria by which your work will be judged, why sacrifice it for pictures which (in this day and age) are hardly likely to cause jaws to drop?
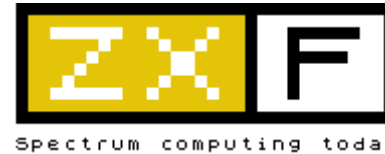
Adventure games used to be about problem solving more than anything else, with the quality of the writing taking something of a back seat. You visited locations. You found objects. you used the objects to solve problems. *Kill ogre*

with sword. Unlock the door with the blue key. And so on. Location descriptions were usually a few lines of fairly bland text (all in block capitals if you were really unlucky), starting with a sentence like, "I/You am/are in a big/little/dark/ wallpapered room..." Somtimes the number of locations ran into triple figures, but quantity rarely bespoke quality. in my mind, the adventure games to appear on the Spectrum (although none of them were written specifically *for* the Spectrum) whichpushed writing up the ladder of priority were titles such as *the Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and any of the **Magnetic Scrolls** adventures (*Jinxter* was a particular favourite of mine). these were titles that appeared fairly late into the Spectrum's day, but - other than memory (all the Magnetic Scrolls adventures, for example, were +3 only games) there is no reason I can think of why this sort of creativity could not have occured earlier. To put it another way, there is no reason why a Spectrum IF game written today could not be judged alongside the very best of the genre - with only text to deal with, system specs become irrelevant (again - memory aside), the playing field is level and we are limited only by our imagina- tions </CLICHE>

Down to the practicalities: what do you need and where do you start? If you're the sort of person who is able to program a complete language parser (the code that analyses a player's instructions) then probably nothing

here will be new to you. the route that everyone else is likely to follow will be to use an adventure game authoring program. the program I'm most familiar with is the **Professional Adventure Writer (PAW)** by **Gilsoft**. This is the program I used to write Blink with and, many years ago, my first ever adventure game, **The Forest Stop**. I remember quite clearly falling in love with PAW when it first came out in 1986. My mate Trev and I had been playing around with **GAC** (Graphic Adventure Creator) from **Incentive** for quite a while, and were about to commit to authoring with it. I don't recall what it was that caused us therefore to get hold of PAW, but we were glad that we did. Little things - like being able to type into your code the actual words you had define in your vocabulary list, rather than just their numbers - made it a lot easier to use. Today, PAW still stands up well for ease of use; there are admitedly a few things that niggle, now that we're all spoilt by WYSIWYG word processors and the like - such as the absence of a copy and paste feature, and having to move backwards through text letter... by... letter... in order to edit something at the begining - but these are minor - you soon get used to them - and some can be worked around by the creative use of emulators.

Following its initial release, PAW received a number of updates, the last (I believe) being version A17C. Along the way, the ability to load in third party modules - or

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ZXF

Spectrum computing today

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old classics again was a real draw, and was my main reason for getting on the 'net. In the past year or two, finding the site WOS (World Of Spectrum) has fulfilled every need, and keeps me in contact with like minded people!
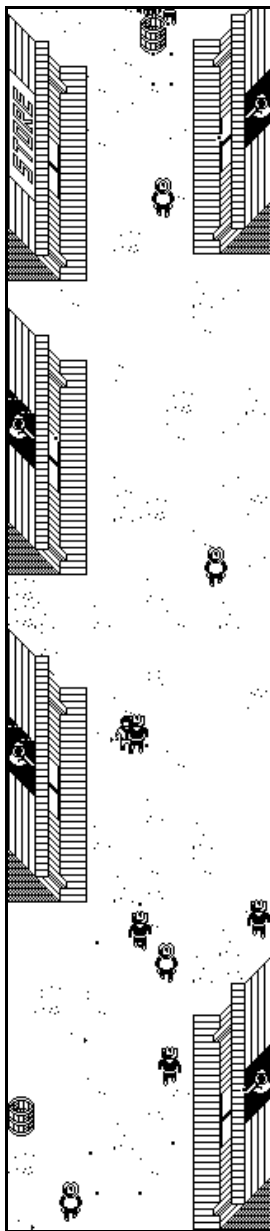
World Of Spectrum has got to be the best thing that has happened in years - unlike some internet communities, it's really active, with many enthusiastic and helpful members. There's barely a day goes by when I don't go to the site and read the forums!

We see quite a bit of you in WoS forums, but I don't recall ever catching sight of you in comp.sys.sinclair. Do you think WoS forums are becoming the new main arena for on-topic Spectrum discussions?

I've had a look on comp.sys.sinclair a bit, but there seems to be an awful lot of irrelevant information. The WOS community seems a more accessible and friendly place to be, and you seem to get to know the regulars on there quite well. I don't know how others feel, but the WOS forum is the place to be for me! It also has the advantage in that you're not bombarded by spam by having your name on there!

Back to Cronosoft: what inspired you to develop this label? When did the idea come to you?

Ever since the mid 80s, I've really wanted to get a program that I'd written published. However - I'm not that great a programmer, so I thought that the next best thing would be to run a software label. I'm really surprised, that with the advent of the internet age, that for the most part, someone hasn't actually done it already. I'm sure, that like me, there are loads of people that have written games, but were too late to get them published by the

mainstream industry. Alternatively, maybe they would like to write a game, if they could get it published/ distributed/appreciated.

It must be very demoralising to write a great game, only to find that no-one really takes notice of it. And, with the only real option being to make it freely downloadable from a website, any future classic is surely going to be overlooked.

Anyway - that was the inspiration! The idea, though it's always been in the back of my mind, came after I finishing off editing the magazine 'Rhetoric', which was the last remaining Oric magazine, around the end of last year. I tested the water by posting a message on the WOS forum, and was contacted immediately by Jonathan Cauldwell. He had a ready made game for release (Egghead in Space). It all happened (very quickly) from there!

The response in WoS forums has been somewhat ecstatic. Were you surprised by such a positive reception?

Definately! There was such enthusiasm and support, and most importantly, people that we're willing to help too - from the programmers, to people like Tommy Pereira (Amigo) who's done a fantastic job in promoting Cronosoft to many other forums and communities.

The wonderful thing was that people were really excited at getting the new software. Some have remarked that getting the games to load by adjusting the volume controls on their cassette players, and actually waiting to load the games was all part of the fun. It was a real nostalgia trip for them - maybe the inconvenience that we lost when we moved to emulators, was also the thing that made us

The law comes to town: asserting your authority in *Dead or Alive*

ZXIF LAUNCHES • CSS FAQ • VBSPEC • AY RIDERS • MICRO MART COMPETITION • SPECTACULATOR 5.1 • YS CDS • ZXCF • REALX

ZXF NEWS

> Shameless self-plug time...

At ZXF we know there's nothing more embarrassingly amusing than an act of gross self-deception, which is probably the best summary for the **new and exciting** range of **ZXF merchandise** now awaiting your purchase at the ZXF shop chéz **cafepress.com**. Decorated in a delightful collection of greens, **www.cafeshops.com/zxf** is now settled in alongside its many neighbours and has already made a reputation for itself by trying to steal sugar from the nearby **www.cafeshops.com/c64files** across the street. They never see the funny side of anything.

You'll be delighted to learn that the ZXF shop stocks branded mugs, T-shirts, mouse mats and more. Yes indeed. There's even a ZXF thong for the ladies (please note, ZXF can accept no responsibility for relationships terminated upon receipt of this gift).

Is that cool or did I just leave the window open too long? ZXF apparel at cafepress.com

> New Spectrum label

Inspired by **Cronosoft**, ZXF has taken a step into the scary world of software. Intended as a new label for text adventures - or *Interactive Fiction*, as these are now called - **ZXIF** launches alongside the publication of this very issue of ZXF with the release of its first 48k title, **Blink**. *Blink* takes place in the fictional Cornish village of Bostagel and involves a bad case of time freeze for you to sort out. Written by yours truely using the Professional Adventure Writing System, the game is heavy on text and pitched generally at a level that should accomodate the beginner, whilst a couple of more taxing puzzles should keep the more seasoned adventurers occupied.

Blink can be purchased online via *PayPal* from the *load* section of the ZXF website (**www.zxf.cjb.net**) and will cost you £1.99 plus 99p postage and packing for UK

ZXIF launches. Gawd bless her.

destinations. Alternatively, if you would prefer to pay by cheque, you can send an email request to **zxif@cwoodcock.co.uk**, and in your reply you'll be told where to send the lolly. Overseas buyers, please contact me by email and we'll work out the cost of postage just as quickly as possible.

And in return you'll get a boxed Spectrum cassette - labelled - with a full colour printed inlay card. But if you'd rather just play the game on a PC to see what it's like, *Blink* will be available for free for a while at the ZXF website (using the rather excellent ZZ Spectrum Java emulator), so you won't even have to part with a penny to find out what it's all about.

If you've written a previously unreleased text/graphic adventure game for the Spectrum and would like to see it published under the ZXIF label, drop me a line at the email address above. As per the Cronosoft model, profits will be split 50-50, so 50p for a £1.99 title (it takes a pound to make each cassette) and 50p per pound charged thereafter. If you've never written one, but would like to have a go, check out the adventure writing guide in **exp**. It's not all that hard, really.

> £1 for ZXF?

ZXF now has a voluntary purchase scheme. If you have downloaded and enjoyed an issue of ZXF, and if you are able to afford to, please consider paying £1 for your issue via the Paypal button on at the ZXF website ('magazine' page).

int

CRONOSOFT

If 2002 was a vintage emulator year, 2003 looks set to be remembered as a classic year for new Spectrum software. In years to come, in fact, we might remember *Cronosoft*, **Simon Ullyatt's** new retro-software label, as a very important landmark indeed. Here he shares with us some reflections on the last few months and on the modern retro scene.

It's been many, many years since a commercial game release for the ZX Spectrum. Oh, we've seen a few odd down-loadable titles over the years - probably most of them Manic Miner remakes (and there's only so much Willy that a man can take, so to speak) - but it's been quite a while since anyone has offered an honest-to-goodness real, physical, tangible tape in a box. And yet, when you check out the ebay auctions, there are literally hundreds of Spectrum cassettes on sale at any given moment. Given that the vast majority of these could be downloaded for nowt at WoS and loaded into emulators that are now so good they stop short only from the emulation of the cold cup of tea you re-discover at the end of a game of Zynaps, do you think there is a growing demand for the Real Spectrum Experience?

Definately! Using an emulator, whilst handy and convenient, is not a patch on using the real thing.

Emulators definately have their place, and are excellent for many reasons. If you fancy a quick blast with the 5 minutes you have to spare, or you want to check out a load of software that you've downloaded quickly, then they're so much more convenient. Also, they offer many more benefits when developing new software too.

After all.. if programmers in the early 1980s had access to hard drives, and PC software for developing games, then the whole gaming history may have been different :)

Having said all that, I don't really enjoy playing games as much on an emulator as much as using the real Spectrum. Emulated games just don't cut it for me... It's perverse to say, but the disadvantages of using a real Spectrum, make it better. Yes... it takes a long time to load the game, but there's the anticipation....! Also, using an old TV gives a much less sharp picture than a PC monitor, but then the graphics look smoother and less blocky. I'm sure there's a benefit of using a wobbly Kempston joystick interface, but I haven't though of one yet ;)

I believe that I'm not the only one to think like this. Also having a shelf full of original Spectrum software is far more preferable (and impressive) than having a destop folder full of .TAP files.

On that point, I couldn't agree more. My own modest collection of titles is growing by the week, and damn if it doesn't look good on the shelf above my desk (my wife disagrees with me; I really can't think why). I might mention that the latest additions up there include - at the moment - the first two Cronosoft titles, and they don't look out of place one smidgen. How does it feel to

know your releases are now out there swelling the prized personal collections of die-hard Spectrum fans?

It's great to think of the games being part of people's collections, and I'm sure it's a good feeling for the authors too. Of course, the games are not going to be produced in the same numbers of those from the golden age of the Spectrum, so it would be fantastic to think of them becoming a future collectible rarity.

Retro computing generally seems to be enjoying a bit of a purple patch at the moment, if the attention being given to the old 8 and 16 bit platforms by the mainstream press is anything to go by. Why do you think this is and do you think interest has peaked yet?

I think interest has probably peaked, and I think it's reached a plateau. There are many people who are 100% into supporting the older systemss (as opposed to those that perhaps casually bought a copy of Namco Museum for their Playstation). I think that if a person ever had any interest in rediscovering an old system, then they would have done it by now, unless they have been living under a stone for the past few years :)

Retrogaming is fashionable at the moment, which is good for

THE FAT LADY HAS SUNG

Alas, it was not to be... Beating the Oric Atmos, the Vic 20 and the Amstrad CPC to make it through to the final round of **Micro Mart** (**www.micromart.co.uk**) magazine's 'Home Computer World Cup' competition, the Spectrum found in the Commodore Amiga an adversary just too strong to trounce. In a two week online vote that pulled in several hundred votes (the highest of the competition), the final count was 45% to the Spectrum and 55% to the Amiga.

The contest started in November 2002, with 16 home computer formats selected to fight it out against each other in a knockout competition that saw weekly jousts between opponents. Surprise results on the way to the final included the defeat of the Atari ST in the first round at the hands of the Amstrad CPC (and likewise the Commodore 64 in the quarter finals) and the PC falling to noneother than the humble BBC

(which eventually ended up in third place). The last battle earned a full, two page spread in issue 743 of the UK computer magazine, with the Spectrum argued for by yours truely and the Amiga handled by regular 'Amiga Mart' columnist Sven Harvey.

A few searches at Micro Mart's website will turn up the text for each round of the competition if you missed out on the drama. My argument for the final is below.

ZX Spectrum, Argued by Colin Woodcock

First published in MicroMart magazine, Issue 743, April 10th 2003

See also *http://www.micromart.co.uk/content/features/default.asp?Category=Article&Type=&ID=1007*

The Amiga is a much-loved computer. With good reason. When I got my first glimpse of this wonderful machine my jaw just simply dropped. Even by today's standards, the basic A500 can still pack a punch. And on this, my best Spectrum buddy's first step away from the 8-bit world, I got my first taste of a WIMP GUI, of photo-realistic graphics, of amazing sound and more. I wanted one.

In fact, the Amiga is the single machine in this contest (other than the PC and the Spectrum) that I do now actually own. Last autumn - some 13 years after first my eyes grew green and greedy at this sight - I finally got my hands on one. One reasonably pleasant evening later and it was consigned to a box in the shed. You see I might be an Amiga owner now, but I wasn't when it counted. And the love just isn't there.

Why didn't I get an Amiga back then? Cost. Practically packed with high-spec hardware, the Amiga was way out of my price range. Instead,

my upgrade route in 1990 was to the SAM Coupé, and here's the thing: despite three subsequent years of happy computing with that superior machine, it's still the Spectrum I return to.

I loved my SAM. 256 colours (no colour clash), 512K RAM (what could possibly use all that?), twin 3.5" floppy drives, the best in-built BASIC I've ever used; it was a dream come true for this Spectrum user. I still have it, but that too resides now in a taped-up box. Meanwhile, my rubber-keyed, 48K Spectrum gleams beautifully on my desk. Would it be any different if I had bought an Amiga instead of a SAM? Actually, I don't think it would.

Because the Spectrum is that first love which just can't be forgotten. Precisely because of its limitations and because so many struggled so hard to overcome them (and still do), because of its low cost that made computing accessible to so many for the first time and because it was (and continues to be) expanded on in more ways than could possibly have been

initially envisaged, it represents the very spirit of invention, inclusion and ingenuity. The essence of working with Spectrums today lies in extremely creative thinking within a very hard set of very real restrictions; in that sense it is a metaphor for life itself.

And thus it merits the crown of this competition. The Amiga is a fantastic computer. But the Spectrum - I believe - is a legend.

then

RETROSPECTIVE... 1982

A brand new column: Matthew Harrodine looks back over the golden years.

The Beginning...

Not all of us will remember 1982 that clearly, I certainly don't! Being merely 5 years old at the time is my excuse. I came to the Spectrum much later, during 1987 in actual fact, and it was somewhat "old hat" then (although still great fun!). Over the following years, my interest in older computers has grown and I spend a lot of time researching their fascinating histories. This column is an attempt to serialise the history of this superb little machine of which I am very fond, year by year. We start with the beginning for the Spectrum, the year 1982.

Sir. Clive's ZX80, and more so the ZX81 bought computing into Joe Public's home and left him wanting much more, in excess of 50,000 ZX80's and 300,000 ZX81's were sold; that's a Sinclair computer in 1 out of 46 (quick and dirty calculation) UK homes even before the launch of the Spectrum.

Annoyed at missing out to former Sinclair employee Chris Curry's Acorn when the tender for the BBC Computer Literacy Project was decided in Acorn's favour, Sir. Clive decided that a sophisticated new machine was required to compete with the new offerings from the new companies. There was no way the ZX81 could hope to compete with the BBC Model A/B machine that had won the tender for the BBC's new project. Thankfully a new machine was already on the agenda, code-named ZX82. It was to stay with the philosophy of the earlier machines but provide much more.

The result was the ZX Spectrum, with enhanced graphics in eight colours and sound. Launched in

April 1982 at the Earl's Court computer fair in London at £125 for the 16Kb model and £175 for the 48Kb model it was incredible value, although most customers were made to wait until at least June for their machines to be delivered - despite the 28 day lead time promised! The 16Kb model didn't last very long, with most people opting for the larger 48Kb of memory from the start. An upgrade was available at £60 to take a 16Kb machine up to its full complement and by the end of the year, the 16Kb model was discontinued due to lack of sales. Typical Sinclair Research produc-tion problems initially restricted sales of the Spectrum, demand was massive in comparison to the companies own forecast. By December, these problems were ironed out and coupled with lucrative deals with the high street's biggest retailers, WH Smith, Boots, and John Menzies (to name a few) the original Spectrum went on to sell in its hundreds of

thousands. It was eventually replaced by the Spectrum + in 1984, but we'll get to that in a later installment.

Competition Old and New...

There was also plenty going on outside the Spectrum world in 1982. Mettoy subsidiary Dragon Data announced the Dragon 32 in August, and it was to become Wales' most notable contribution to the fledgling home computer industry. The Dragon was an advanced machine, powerful and expandable - a decent alternative to the BBC Microcomputer. It was also compatible (due to some questionable engineering practices which nearly ended in acrimony) with the Tandy Colour Computer. It was more expensive than the Spectrum at £199.

Disenchanted Sinclair employees, Richard Altwasser and Steven Vickers, left to set up Cantab which produced the Jupiter Ace in late 1982. The Ace was based

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IS THIS THE COOLEST SPECTRUM IN THE WORLD?

*> ZXCF CompactFlash interface from Sami Vehmaa*

That there is a Compact Flash card peeking out of the Spectrum above. yes it is. And since last issue's feature of Roelof Koning's work, the subject has been creeping up quite a bit in online discussions recently.

Sami's system above uses **Garry Lancaster's** *ResiDos* to access the CF card and also features a Versatile Memory Unit that offers up to 1MB RAM in (lots of) 16K pages. He is also working on a version for the +3 which is compatible with the latest of Garry's +3e ROMs.

The bad news is that the soldering is far from easy, so electronics lightweights like myself will have to be content to look on in envy for the time being. Perhaps, however, another significant step has been taken towards the plug-in interface that someone, one day, is going to design and get Sintech to distribute. I'm allowed to dream, aren't I?

You can read up on the *ZXCF* at **http://home.sol.se/amiga/**, Sami's ZX Spectrum Hardware DIY site, and ResiDos can be found - along with information about the +3e ROMs - at **www.zxplus3e.plus.com**.

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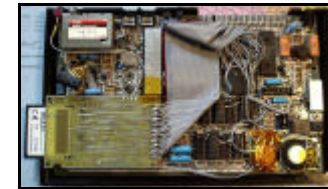
of ten questions, each with four possible answers. Final answer? Each question features a screen-shot with four possible titles to choose from.

On the response to *Top Trumps*, Nick told *ZXF*, "It was amazing, especially considering that it was a freak idea that came out of the blue on a late Friday night! I sent it to the b3ta mailing list on the off-chance that they'd like it, they put it into their newsletter, and I got around 4,500 visitors on the afternoon their newsletter went out. To put that in perspective, the average number of visitors to the website is around 1,500 (lower in the summer months).

"I started getting referrers from other people's home pages all over the world, including many in foriegn languages from people who I was rather surprised had made the connection between Top Trumps and the Speccy.

"The cherry on the cake was the mention in Web User, a print magazine that I've never heard of, but hey, it's all good publicity for the site.

"A month after I did Top Trumps, I wrote the herbal-Nytol-induced Who Wants To Be A Squillionaire? b3ta plugged it again, and that day I got over 8,000 visitors, and the additional referrers from other people's sites, blogs, Livejournals, etc... The bandwidth for the month Squillionaire came out came within a few K of my 10Gb/month limit (usually it hovers around 6Gb) and was easily the most popular month for the website.

"And the reasons for the games, apart from strange brainwaves that occasionally hit me? Mainly just to teach myself something new when it comes to program-ming Perl CGI scripts. It's also a way of avoiding my commitments to The Tipshop (thousands of

![Load]

Egghead in Space and *Dead or Alive* the hook to keep you playing just simply isn't there. There's nothing overtly bad about the game - the sprites are large and well drawn, and float around the screen very smoothly indeed - but after you've bloated a few nasty aliens off the screen with your gum fuelled bubbles, you're left wandering what else there is to do. The screens do change, but the gameplay remains pretty much the same.

If *Gloop* is a Cauldwell average (and still - I might add - better than I could ever achieve with my non-existent knowledge of machine code), then **Amusement Park**, Jonathan's entry into this year's **minigame** competition (see *new*) is a masterpiece. And it's written - wait for it - in just 4k of code. Most of us have probably downloaded our fair share of size-restricted demos and games in the past and marvelled at what's been achieved in such a tiny amount of memory, but - let's be honest here - it's not as though the games are actually all that playable. *Amusement Park*, however, had a friend and I up 'til 2am two nights in a row trying to make our fortune through bouncy castles and amazing mazes. Addictive just isn't the word.

Amusement Park is one of those games that sees you ascribing human qualities to routines so small a Quicksilva ant could probably gobble them up and still have room for more. Am I the only one to have spotted, for example, that some of the little stick people that march merrily into the park seem to get away without paying? And are those one or two punters that spend month after month waiting in the entrance to the ferris wheel really under the impression that their turn has not yet come and the wait will be worth it nonetheless, or do we have a vagrant problem? The deeper you get into the game, the more the 4K restriction on the
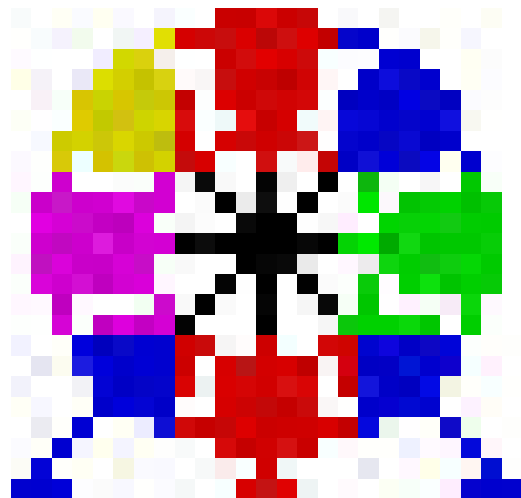
coding becomes apparent: you can't add more than 10 rides, for example, which led (on night two) to the conception of 'Statue City' as the best way to up our ranking; all of this, however, only seems to increase the game's addictiveness and enjoyability - the sight of a single visitor spending several years staring at a sea of identical statues led to some inspired speculation on his/her predicament (and all this, by the way, without alchohol).

So *Amusement Park* is probably best experienced with a friend. My friend on these two evenings had never actually heard - let alone seen - a Spectrum before, so s/he doesn't need to be Sinclair literate. A young Internet gamer, Serban told me initially he didn't like the look of Spectrum games since the graphics were no good. Night three is now already planned, however, and will involve the game being played in two emulator windows so we can compete directly. A convert? Well he's all set to download **Spectaculator** for himself when he goes home.

As I understand it, Jonathan plans

to develop *Amusement Park* into a fully fledged 16K title for Cronosoft (never before has 16K sounded like so much memory). It is my sincere hope that the basic game stays pretty much the same, albeit with a few extra features. May I humbly suggest security gaurds, for example, to track down those rogue freeloaders (why should the honest customers suffer through increased ticket prices?) and burger bars to feed those long-term visitors (a death in the park would not be good PR). This will be a title I will really look forward to.

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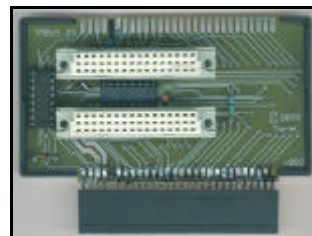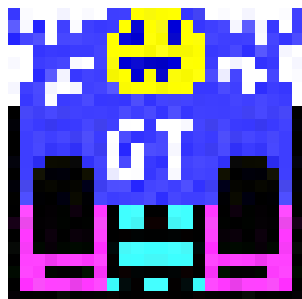
some more are on the way. They are:

- *YAMOD.ATBUS - IDE multiplexer (drives harddisks, CD readers, Compact Flash, etc).*
- *YAMOD.EPROG - theoretically an EPROM programmer, but practically a universal parallel interface (30 bits).*
- *YAMOD.IDE8255 - easier (read: slower) IDE multiplexer.*
- *YAMOD.ZXINPUT - gives you the possiblility to connect a PC keyboard and mouse (seen as a Kempston Mouse or Sam Mouse). Also can generate interrupts on every screen line as the Sam does.*
- *YAMOD.KJ - just Kempston Joystick.*
- *YAMOD.KMOUSE - means Kempston Mouse - requires a mouse from Amigi.*
- *YAMOD.FDC765A - floppy driver controller. Will work in two modes: ZX Spectrum +3 compatibile and ISA (the same as you connect a ISA Multi I/O card).*
- *YAMOD.AY - sound interface. Extra option is IIC magistral and a possibility to add 8kB EEPROM, used by ZXVGS.*
- *YAMOD.EPLIP - closely undefined (for me) very fast parallel interface, with FIFO buffers.*
- *YAMOD.8250 - serial interface - as in PC. ZXVGS can use a PC mouse connected to this*

module (I know, I have the prototype inside my Sam Coupe).

- *YAMOD.8211 - PC-like printer interface.*
- *YAMOD.MB02 - is an 8255 PIO with DB37 slot, as in MB-02.*
- *YAMOD.PCMOUSE - simple RS232 for PC mouse - only 1200bps and 19200bps.*
- *YAMOD.SIO - for radio amateurs - turns your computer into a TNC modem. You need only the BayCom modem at the end. (Not exactly for ZX Spectrum, but...)*
- *YAMOD.ETHERNET - perhaps a bit expensive, but there's a module (www.embeddedethernet.com/), that doesn't need a PC to work.*

More information at:

http://zx.yarek.com/dYABUS-en.html

I will offer for sale both ready-made interfaces and DIY kits. Full documentation guarranteed in .html and .jpg files. (Also for Eagle (www.cadsoft.de) .sch and .brd files.) You can also expect support for YAMODs in ZXVGS (http://zxvgs.yarek.com/)

Now I want you to think how can you use the YABUS.ZX...

> zxUSB from Dave Mills

Yet more hardware; in this case 'unmade' hardware: a schematic for a USB interface for the Spectrum - and this one gets my personal nomination for being put in a glass box to have sugar thrown at it. The possibilities are endless and it takes us one step closer still to that dream of the handy mass storage device - in this case, of course, those ridiculously small memory sticks. The project is still in an early stage, but Dave (known to us all,

incidentally, as shady **comp.sys.sinclair Crap Games Competition 2003** host Dave the Lurker) welcomes any comments on the design. He told ZXF "the design is totally free. To missquote Crowley, 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the license'. I have no objection to anyone making and selling these, I hope they do in fact." **Sintech** - are you listening?

Coming soon to a Spectrum near you?

Dave's original **css** post:

Q. What is zxUSB?

A. zxUSB is an attempt to get a working USB controller on to the humble speccy. It is based on the NatSemi USBN9603 USB controller IC.

Q. What software exists?

A. None at present. If you are seriously interested in writing a driver for a piece of hardware, then contact me and I'll try to make a development board available to you.

Q. Where can I find it then?

A. Glad you asked that. Take a look at:

http://8bitorbust.info/sinclair/spectrum/hardware/zxUSB/RELEASE1.0/

Questions / comments / really silly mistakes to point out ?

This is a very exciting hardware project that potentially any of us could get our hands on - soldering skills or not - if it should come to be distributed. The current design is for a straightforward edge connector device, but Dave is also developing a version for YABUS.ZX.

Load

Maria vs some b*****ds

Author: **Erix1**   Price: **Free**   Download: **www.zxdemo.org/extra/maria.zip**

If I'm brutally honest, **Manic Miner** and its numerous sequels never really did all that much for me. I appreciate the significance of the game and - don't get me wrong - I don't *dis*like the game, but beyond filling a few dull moments of boredom or work avoidance it services no major need for me. One aspect of my indifference to the genre - probably the major one - is the graphics. To me they're pretty much of a muchness, samey, nothing to write home about. And so on. Yes, I'm aware I've missed the whole point, but there just isn't enough there to get me to it.

Which is why **Maria vs some b*****ds** took me so completely by surprise. The graphics are, quite simply, superb. Without

using any special machine code tricks; simply by using Spectrum colour intelligently, **Erix1** - author of this, one of the latest MM games to be released via the extremely industrious **Manic Miner and Jet Set Willy Yahoo! Group** *(http://groups.yahoo.com/group/manicminerandjetsetwilly/)* - has created one of the most visually stunning Spectrum titles I have ever seen. Many of the screens, in fact, look as though they could easily have stepped right off an 8-bit console, that's how good they are. I've always thought that BRIGHT was seriously underused in Spectrum colour and looking at this game I now feel completely justified in that view. I can't help but feel that if this game had appeared mid 80s the Spectrum world would have gone nuts about it.

Oh yes, the plot. Well it's this: Miner Willy has gone and got
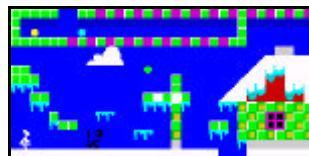
himself kidnapped by some very naughty ninjas and is being held for ransom (do ninjas really do the ransom thing?) for the pricely sum of 240 items. So Maria, Willy's long-suffering and much misunderstood housekeeper (she's a softy at heart really) is off to fetch these for him. It's kind of a spin-off really - or one of those sequels where they can't afford to get the original actors involved.

I'm really into this game, and MM/JSW fans will no doubt be pleased to know I am now spending time thinking about the puzzles. Now I want to see the next screen, see? And then the one after it. And the one after that. And maybe I might get converted along the way.

Emulator news

RealX

***RealX* is coming...** The long-awaited successor to the immensley popular *RealSpectrum*, now has a release date of September 2003. Note it in your diary. The new emulator promises to be quite unlike anything we've ever seen before; in anticipation of the big event, ZXF caught up with the *Ramsoft* team to get the low down on this program.

RealSpectrum, for some time now, has been considered by many the most comprehensive Spectrum emulator in existence. We've been waiting with baited breath for your next generation windows emulator for some time now, and it says a lot about the popularity of RealSpectrum that the smallest bits of information about RealX seem to be received with great anticipation. Can we expect the same range of features from the new version that the DOS emulator has accumulated during its development?

RealX incorporates all the features that were available in RealSpectrum plus a lot of new ones, some of them will take advantage of the multimedia environment offered by Windows; here's a brief list of what to expect:

- A revolutionary user interface. We have designed a completely new and original concept for user interaction, based on intuitive manipulation of objects and extensive use of graphics. It's not like anything you have already used or seen anywhere, and like all radical innovations we expect people to love it or to hate it :-)

- Multi-channel audio (4 speakers) with customizable

positional effects

- Special post-processing multimedia effects (video interpolations, etc)

- Videoface emulation (through DirectShow video capture)

- TRUE GeneralSound emulation (multi-CPU)

- Variable CPU speed (turbo modes)

- Embedded MakeTZX and Tape Editor (featuring renewed engine)

- Enhanced networking capabilities

If it sounds too much to be true, you'll believe soon :-)

Has RealX been a complete rewrite or is it a development of existing RealSpectrum code?

RealX is a completely new emulator, totally rewritten from scratch. The RealSpectrum project is dated 1999 and the original plans were to emulate just 1/10th of what we have now - just 48K and 128K Spectrums, DISCiPLE and something else... no clones, no Interface 1, no MB-02+, etc.; fortunately, we designed it in a very modular way, so we haven't had too much trouble adding new computer models and peripherals. With RealX we go even further, allowing third-party plug-ins to extend the emulator's capabilities. The most important goals we intended to achieve with a complete rewrite were higher speed and flexibility; for example, the Z80 microcode core routines are now written in x86-MMX assembly optimized by hand and it's much faster than the old one: during the tests we have "clocked" our emulated Z80 up to 224MHz (64x) without noticeable slowdown!

Over the past eighteen months or so the emulator scene has

developed a great deal. Emulators such as SPIN and Spectaculator have pushed the boundaries considerably, with contributions also from Klive, Es.pectrum and vbSpec. My guess is that users now have much higher expectations from a Windows emulator than they did at the start of this period, when ZX32 was still a solid favourite.

Some of the developments during this time have been in areas previously dominated only by RealSpectrum and perhaps also Z80 (eg, Interface One emulation), however we have also seen some very creative thinking surfacing as completely new emulator features - for example SPIN's Keyboard helper. What are your own favourites amongst these developments, and do you have any other thoughts on the direction Spectrum emulation has recently taken?

In our opinion, emulation accuracy takes the first place: not quantity, but quality. Hence we particularly prefer those works where efforts have been made to reproduce the behavior of real machines and peripherals as close as possible. The user interface then plays a very important role. Ideally we wish to save the user from any direct interaction with low-level settings by guessing what he's trying to achieve, and do that for him automatically (e.g. no messing with tons of obscure options but an "intelligent supervision" - like easy access to essential controls or automatic FlashLoad/FastLoad switching control): the user must be able to experience emulation only with a few clicks; this doesn't mean that RealX won't have lots of customizable options, but that the user will have to access them less frequently. Of course we're not going to name this or that emulator saying which one is best, worst or has followed the "right

wibble

about games, etc.), please write to me. My English is very weak, but I'm sure anybody would help me to correct it.

Sincerely yours,

Pgyuri

WSS Team

In case you missed the review last issue, WSS's game, *Flash beer* can be downloaded for free from www.c-system.hu/edy/wss/flb/ Flash Beer was also reviewed in Micro Mart issue 757.

Fantastic stuff. It really brought to me all the things going on within the spectrum community. I found the tutorial on bmp2scr very informative thanks. I have great respect for all those who have written spectrum emulators they've brought a lot of joy to my life and a sparkle to my eye as I revisit my youth. And programs such as 7up very useful.

But......one thing I would love to see (well actually two) I wonder when any one will bother to write a shoot 'em up construction kit for the spectrum? I had a lot of fun with this on the 64 and AtariST. Perhaps It could use a program like 7up to produce backgrounds, sprites and loading screen$ and then writ a .TZX file which you could use on an emulator or a real spectrum. Colour scrolling, fine or smooth, multi colour sprites (like Light force, or Zynaps).

Perhaps even programming tools to write a game from scratch, port it to an emulator to check if it crashes and again produce a .TZX file to load up on your humble speccy (maybe even Chronosoft may distribute it for you!). The bedroom coder returns!!!!

Any way enough rambling please keep up the good work!

DRaLLaFE

Budding bedroom coders might like to check out one of Cronosoft's exciting future releases: PLATFORM GAME DESIGNER by Jonathan Cauldwell.   Keep an eye on www.cronosoft.co.uk for news of the release date.

Spectrum Computing Today is wonderful. Just found it. Here's a modest proposal that the speccy community might consider. It is designed to stimulate discussion.

A goal: to create a new Spectrum capable of running the old software we know and love, but extensible, flexible, and powerful: a low-cost, easy-to-use, and easy-to-program computer.

There are some really inspired and dedicated hardware and software enthusiasts out there, most short of time and money, who produce some amazing work, & who could contribute coherently to a new Spectrum. They need support.

There must be enough speccy enthusiasts around to contribute enough micropayments, one way and another to build-up a fund to offer grants to these individuals to produce the component parts of a new speccy, working together online in the spirit of the Linux/Open Source community, but without the unfortunate political splits and fragmentation.

Any such fund would need to be placed in a secure account with a real bank, and funds released from it only when all members of an elected board agree unanimously, after taking public submissions, that an individual or group is capable and willing to produce a specific piece of work.

The group should be a non-profit making trust, publishing its accounts online.

The board might be constituted of say 6 to 12 trusted representa-

tives from the speccy enthusiast community, chosen by an initial vote on a major Speccy website, meeting regularly online. All facets of the scene should be represented. The members would elect a chairperson for the year. The other members could vote off any single member for any specific misdemeanour. The original members voting unanimously could create a new member. This sounds unduly officious, but only by offering a centralised virtual 'HQ' to offer some direction and coherence to future Spectrum development, are we going to get a new machine.

Any new Spectrum design should be extensible, modular, and fully and freely documented.

The IDSA copyright issue will not go away and should be seen as a wake-up call, requiring a practical, mature, and legal response (even if privately, we think it is a sledgehammer-to-crack-a-nut piece of corporate thuggery). Bluntly, a new Spectrum is going to have to have a 48k compatibility mode-perhaps compatibility modes for other original versions too. This is the *only* way we can ensure that the machine will run the vast amount of original software, from the original cassettes, that made it famous. Any other solution will involve legal grief that will get in the way of our goals.

A specific form might be drawn up to allow those holding the copyright of Spectrum games to (a) surrender that copyright to the board, allowing the software to be freely disseminated, or (b) permit an authorised and respected software company to re-release the software, within specific constraints, paying a royalty to the current copyright holder for each sale ('Ultimate' titles spring to mind here). Those who create wonderful things ought to be rewarded for their

years, the last six issues of which were availible as PDF downloads, just like ZXF. These are still available for download at the Alchemist Research web site at **http://website.lineone.net/~alche mistresearch/**

MAGAZINE ZX GOES PDF

> New PDF mag

Speaking of PDF magazines, **Magazine ZX**, a new, online magazine in Spanish for Spectrum enthusiasts has appeared in both HTML and PDF versions. I don't understand a word of it myself, but looking at the careful step through on how to connect a 3.5 inch floppy drive to a +3, I very much wish I could. It looks superb. Both versions can be accessed at **www.speccy.org/magazinezx/lista _revistas.php**

VAT @ EBAY

> Online marketplace adds in tax

It had to happen sooner or later. eBay, our online single source for all things Spectrum (when the local car boot sale fails to deliver) has restructured its fees pricing as of 1st July in response to a new European Union directive that VAT now has to be paid on all services and products sold from European Internet sites. The change has

enraged many traders; some who view it as European interference, others who seem to believe the new law is just being used by eBay as an excuse to increase their fees. Indeed, eBay have - in addition to implementing the VAT law - restructured their insertion, feature and final value fees at the same time, all changes taking place together on 1st July: "We have raised some fees, reduced others, while keeping some the same." And, in the meantime, all of us are confused.

Comments submitted by readers of the BBC News Online website in response to the story seem to suggest that many are mis-interpreting this as a VAT on the final price of an item, which it is not. The VAT is charged only on the services sold by eBay to its users - in other words, the fees. So the Insertion Fee for an item priced initially between £1.00 and £4.99 has risen from 15p to 20p, for example, while the Final Value Fee on an item fetching between £30 and £599.99 has risen from 2.75% to 3.25 (FVFs on items below £30 remain fixed at 5.25%). A number of other services have seen rises also, such as the 'Buy it now' option (5p to 6p) and Photo hosting (10p to 12p for each photograph after the first, free one - of course you can always host the photographs yourself for nothing).

eBay announcment: **http://pages.ebay.co.uk/vat-landing/pricing/**

BBC coverage: **http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/busines s/2968106.stm**

SIR CLIVE ROLLS ON

> 'C6' set for 2004 appearance

It's official: Clive Sinclair is better than George W Bush. At driving the Segway scooter around, that is. Where the leader of the free

world fell over the handlebars, Sir Clive made it all look easy in his recent road test for BBC News Online in August.

And whilst he did so, he happened to mention news of a successor to the C5 in the works, due to be unveiled, he claims, next year.

All Sir Clive would say about the new project, other than that it's being developed jointly with a British-based engineering company which specialises in compact electric motors and drive systems, is that it will be a "new product designed at getting people around town."

Can this be consigned to the same flying pie that includes the fabled 'ZX 2000' below its flaky pastry crust? And is Sir Clive genuinely onto something this time or will his new gamble, if it ever appears, be the last breath of Sinclair Research? Let's hope not. Read the full story (including a snazzy video clip of Sir Clive taking his test Segway for a spin) at:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/maga zine/3125341.stm